

オリンピックの通訳について —文献考察とインタビュー調査より— Interpreting at the Olympics: A Survey of the Literature and Interview

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ABSTRACT

Many types of interpreters are at work during the Olympic Games. With Tokyo selected as the host city of the 2020 Summer Olympics, interpretation in this arena will become an increasingly relevant topic for Japan. This paper explores interpreting experiences in previous Olympics and offers suggestions for providing better interpretation in Tokyo in 2020. We conducted a survey of the literature and an interview in order to review the experiences of interpreters. We reviewed information including interpreter types, interpreting mode, interpreter recruitment and training, and working environments. Results from the survey and interview showed a consistency in interpreter types and interpretation mode. The literature also showed that official interpreters at the Olympics performed both as conference and dialogue interpreters, while unofficial (volunteer) interpreters mainly worked as dialogue interpreters, and sometimes assumed other roles. Working environments for interpreters varied. Regarding recruiting and training, whilst our survey showed that there were written tests and interviews for hiring interpreters, and training workshops were

held, the interviewee had already worked as a professional interpreter but had taken no tests for interpreting and training. A number of suggestions were presented in these studies, including preparing telephone interpreting services, offering an appropriate interpreting test, providing various types of training, a real-time information database, and a support community. With input and lessons from previous Olympics, appropriate preparation will make the 2020 Tokyo Olympics more fruitful for athletes, guests, and interpreters.

本研究の目的は、過去のオリンピックにおける通訳の事例を調査し、その調査結果を通じて、来たる東京五輪においてより良い言語・通訳サービスが提供されるように提言を行うことである。先行論文の検索とインタビューにより、通訳者の種類、通訳の形式、通訳者の雇用、通訳者の訓練、通訳者の労働環境などにかかわる情報を抽出した。五輪公式通訳者は会議通訳者およびダイアログ通訳者として業務に従事したことが示された。さらに、通訳者の種類、通訳の形式は文献検索と質問紙調査結果で一致していた。研究結果からの提言には、電話通訳サービスの準備、適切な通訳試験の実施、多様な手段を使用した訓練、リアルタイムの情報データベース、サポートコミュニティの提供が挙げられる。提言に基づき準備を行うことで、2020年東京大会が競技者、来訪者、そして通訳者にとって実り多いものになることが期待される。

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

A fact sheet on the previous Olympic Games (2012) indicated how many athletes and personnel have taken part in the event. More than 10,000 athletes from 199 nations participated in the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney (Preuss, H., 2001). At the London Summer Olympics in 2012, 10,568 athletes competed and more than 70,000 volunteers provided support (Fact sheet on previous Olympic Games, 2012). Among many factors behind a successful Olympics, one of the most important is effective communication and interpreters, who bear the very important role of bridging the communication gap between people of different countries. Collis (2007) insisted “During the Olympics, language skills and services were vital not only in ensuring a quality experience for athletes, visitors, and the Olympic family during the events, but in creating a legacy for communities and employers in the years after the Games”. Babirecki-Labrum (2000) noted that interpreters in

the Olympics participate in several modes including simultaneous and consecutive. In sharing experiences of the London 2012 Olympics online, the Japan Local Government Centre (2014) in London referred to volunteer interpreters called Games Makers who assisted with the event.

Various types of interpreters work in their Olympic settings but no studies have examined their previous experience in order to determine the means of achieving effective interpreting services in the Olympics. Against the backdrop of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) which selected Tokyo as the host city of the 2020 Summer Games, this paper explores the experience of interpreting in previous Olympics and offers suggestions for better interpreting services for Tokyo, 2020.

1.2 Theoretical background

The Japan Interpreter’s Association (2007) noted that many demands—such as financial-, technological- and language-related—surfaced in the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo. Before those

Games, to meet the linguistic needs, Professor Mitsuko Saito at International Christian University in Tokyo began training a corps of student interpreters. At the time, there were no established professional interpreters, let alone interpreter training schools. Many such schools now exist, especially in Tokyo, but Olympic interpreter is still not an established profession. Looking back on previous Games, Yue (2008) discussed two types of interpreters in Sydney in 2000: professional interpreters (further divided into simultaneous and consecutive interpreting) and volunteer language assistants. Their differences can be seen as analogous with conference interpreters and community interpreters, although the latter are now working to establish their profession, not as volunteers but professional interpreters.

Pöchhacker (2003) distinguished two types of interpreters and discussed interpreters' roles from a structural viewpoint. As shown in Figure 1, conference interpreters interpret in multilateral conferences in international settings, whereas community interpreters interpret in face-to-face dialogue at the intra-social or community level. It is notable that community interpreters perform on both a professional and interpersonal level, because they simultaneously communicate with the two parties and conduct face-to-face communication.

Hale (2007, p.25) wrote, "Community interpreting takes the interpreters into the most private spheres of human life". They interpret in daily settings. Therefore, as Garber (2000, p.43) discusses, "the circumstances in which community interpreters practice carry even more risk and more responsibility than conference interpreting". Mizuno (2008, p.6) defined community interpreters as: "interpreters who facilitate communication through bridging the gap of the language barriers in public services, including court, hospital, and administration. They differ from conference

interpreters and liaison interpreters."

These studies suggest that an interpreter's role varies according to his or her type, the setting, and the scope of the work. An interpreter is not only bilingual, but sometimes has to step into highly private aspects of life.

2. Methods

We used two methods in studying interpreters in previous Olympics: literature survey and interview. Our literature survey covered articles in newspapers, published journals, and websites from 2008 to 2014 identified through an Internet search on the phrase "Olympic interpreters". From these selected articles, we gathered relevant information including interpreter types, interpreting mode, interpreter recruitment and training, and working environments.

We also interviewed a highly experienced professional interpreter who worked at the London Olympics. For this we employed our own questionnaire covering the same topics that we searched for in the literature survey. We sent this electronically in August 2014 and received a reply the next month.

3. Results 1: Results from literature survey

3.1 Types of Interpreter

About 60 conference interpreters and many volunteer language assistants worked at the Sydney Olympics (Pastor 2000). Two types of interpreters worked at the London Olympics: official interpreters and volunteer interpreters called Games Makers. Games Makers covered various tasks other than interpreting, including being dancers in the opening ceremony, receptionists, and administrators.

3.2 Mode of Interpreting

There were professional interpreters (divided into simultaneous and consecutive interpreting) and volunteer language assistants in Sydney, as Yue (2008) discussed. According to Pastor (2000), the choice of simultaneous or consecutive depended on both the languages required and the venue. In addition to face-to-face interpreting, there was also remote interpreting. A multilingual switchboard (MLSB) was based in the Olympic Village, offering a telephone interpretation service that covered 51 languages. If a particular language assistant was not available, the call was diverted to the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) provided by the Australian Government's Department of Immigration and Border Protection (2014).

In London, volunteer interpreters provided face-to-face interpretation covering more than 20 languages. When a particular language was unavailable, telephone interpreting services were used.

3.3 Recruiting Interpreters

According to Yue (2008), there were 88 interpreters (38 simultaneous and 50 consecutive) for Sydney. Simultaneous interpreters with extensive experience interpreting in Olympics were selected from abroad. The language service unit of the Sydney Olympic Committee selected consecutive interpreters. All 50 consecutive interpreters had a qualification from the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) as professional level or above. The Sydney Olympic Committee chose language assistants through writing and interview tests to assess language and other necessary skills.

In the London Olympics, official interpreters were selected from among experienced interpreters. Volunteer interpreters were selected through writing and interview tests. From 240,000 applicants who replied to advertisements, 70,000

volunteer interpreters were selected.

3.4 Training Interpreters

Yue (2008) interviewed some interpreters and described the training process of the interpreters of Sydney. First, the interpreters in the Games attended briefings to obtain basic knowledge of the Olympics and the interpreting. Second, they joined several workshops for preparations. After the workshops, they were provided means of access to some online resources to help fulfill their duties in the Games. Many interpreters were experienced and they knew how to prepare on their own. Some of them were interpreting teachers. Therefore, they could train themselves in preparing interpreting for the Olympics.

In London, official interpreters only interpreted in certain settings, but volunteer interpreters (Games Makers) played many roles other than interpreting, so their training also varied. Nishikawa (2014) noted that "Games Makers were assigned more than 860 jobs, including setting up venues, helping athletes in the athletes' village, performing dance at ceremonies..." (translated from the original Japanese). Games Makers participated in orientation programs to gain background knowledge on the Games, and then took part in workshops focused on individual jobs. 'Diversity' (the fact of including wide range of people such as those who are physically challenged) was a key theme in the event so specific training was given on this topic.

3.5 Working Environment for Olympics Interpreters

Yue (2008) wrote that hours of duty differed among each job. In professional interpreting, simultaneous interpreters mainly interpreted in conference rooms, and in press conference centers with interpreting booths. Consecutive interpreters sat alongside speakers and used notepads and pens.

Volunteer interpreters worked in shifts, and again hours of duty varied among each job in shifts of up to 8 hours.

Nishikawa (2014) reported that in the London Olympics, Games Makers were not provided accommodation, but because most were local people this was not necessary. To commemorate their taking part in the event they were given gifts such as sweaters, caps, watches, bags, and certificates of appreciation.

4. Results 2: Interview Findings

We e-mailed a questionnaire to an interpreter (“Interpreter A”) in August 2014 and received his replies the next month. Interpreter A is a professional interpreter whose language pair is English and Japanese. He was in his 40s when he interpreted at the London Olympics; his first time interpreting at the Games.

4.1 Interpreter Types

In response to a question on whether he was an official (paid) interpreter or a Games Maker (volunteer), he indicated he was a paid interpreter hired by a broadcasting company.

4.2 Interpreting Mode

Interpreter A answered that the main mode of interpreting during the event (simultaneous, consecutive, whispering or other) was liaising with film crews in filming events, interviewing participants, and other situations. Liaison interpreting usually implies consecutive interpreting. Although trained as an English-Japanese interpreter, he also interpreted between French and Japanese in interviewing a rower from Niger in the press area of the athletes’ village.

4.3 Recruitment

Related to the recruiting process, Interpreter A

had worked as a reporter and interpreted for crew members covering events for a Japanese broadcasting company. As to how he found the interpretation job for the London Olympics, he answered that he “had previously worked with the broadcasting company as a reporter, researcher and coordinator” and the company knew his “language and related abilities and they contacted him directly.”

4.4 Training

Concerning training, Interpreter A reported there were no briefings, training or workshop sessions for his duties for the event. He did, however, have access to a substantial amount of information, including venues and schedules both in print format and online, provided by the organizers. He reported that the organizing committee maintained a database to share up-to-date information on events, results and other areas of interest.

4.5 Working Environment for Olympics Interpreters

We asked Interpreter A to elaborate on his specific duties during the event. He mentioned that mainly he helped film crews get to their destinations and interpreted their requests and questions. At one time, he facilitated a crew’s access to a major hammer thrower from Japan in the training area of the main stadium. Another time he visited a pub with the crew where they filmed customers’ reactions to a Japanese swimmer in the finals. Interpreter A and the crew also went to *The Guardian* newsroom to interview a soccer correspondent about the chances of the Japanese soccer teams and to Wembley Stadium to interview fans and soccer scouts about the Japanese men’s team. These sessions lasted one to two hours.

Interpreter A mentioned that he did not work in a shift system. Regarding food or meals while at work, he answered that he received an allowance

for food. He wrote that a large food and shopping “village” was attached to the broadcast and media centers. As for whether he received any commemorative items, he said he received an Olympic backpack. Interpreter A did not receive accommodation because he lived in London. However, his colleagues from places other than London stayed in hotels.

4.6 Other Findings Regarding Interpreters in the Olympics

In working for the media company, Interpreter A was an interpreter as a regular employee rather than on a commissioned basis. He also indicated that he did not think the knowledge or terminology for interpreting in the Olympics was more difficult or specialized than for other occasions.

We asked him about non-interpreting tasks assigned to him during the Olympics. He wrote, “My official job title was researcher. It was within that framework that I was called upon to interpret.” He continued on how he worked at the event:

“Duties involved everything necessary to find out the information required to make televisual coverage of the games. From simple things like checking the age and past achievements of athletes to arrange for interviews with coaches and athletes (where I would then be called on to interpret). The vast majority of NHK’s film crews were Japanese nationals who came over for the games and who spoke little or no English. I would go around with them and interpret for them.”

Interpreter A mentioned he had no partners (interpreters) with whom he worked. When asked to describe the impressive or special aspects of interpreting in the Olympics, he answered that it was “very special to meet and interpret for elite athletes/coaches” and he was able to “also get

access to privileged areas and get to see how the games function from close up”.

5. Discussions

The results from our literature survey and interview showed consistency in interpreter types and mode of interpreting for Olympic interpreters. As discussed in the theoretical background, conference and dialogue interpreters were also present at the Olympics. Our survey indicated that official Olympic interpreters performed in both capacities, while unofficial (volunteer) interpreters worked mainly as dialogue interpreters, along with various other roles. Interpreter A, however, performed interpreting routinely as part of his work as a researcher; demonstrating that even official interpreters can work in non-interpreting roles. Working environments for interpreters varied from working sessions of a few hours to working all day. The difference depended on the job specifics. As for recruiting and training, the literature survey found that there were written tests and interviews for hiring interpreters, and training workshops. Our interviewee, however, was hired by a broadcasting company without any tests or training.

5.1 Suggestions for Future Olympics

Our research regarding previous Olympics offers possibilities for potential preparation for future Games. We have a number of suggestions.

1. Telephone interpreting service

It is unrealistic to secure interpreters for all languages of all the participants’ countries, but telephone interpreting services can be provided irrespective of time, place, or specialty. Azarmina and Wallace (2005), in a systematic review, suggested that “remote interpretation is an acceptable and accurate alternative to traditional methods.”

2. Interpreting test for recruitment

If interpreters possess qualifications such as tour guide interpreting in Japan or the NAATI (The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters) accreditation in Australia, interpreting tests could be omitted. However, essentially there should be a test to ensure quality interpretation. Moser-Mercer et al. (2000) researched the differences between unexperienced and skilled interpreters' performance to define expertise in interpreting. These differences could then be used as an index for assessing skilled interpreters. Tests and assessment tools for interpreting from previous studies (Pöschhacker 2001; Pinkerton and Grainger 2004) could also be used.

3. Various types of training

A single training medium is insufficient because various people will be working at the Tokyo Olympics. Careful selection of media should be conducted to accommodate all generations. Media can include briefings (workshops), online information, and books. Interpreters being able to exchange information with each other at every stage of the Games (before, during, and after) will be extremely useful. When selecting media, careful consideration must be given to which media are appropriate in interpreting training. One should consider that, as Lee and Owen (2004) noted, to use multimedia in education, needs analysis of the targeted population is an important factor.

4. Real-time information database

Updating of the results of the Games online on a real-time basis would be a valuable resource for interpreters. With the latest information, interpreters could be prepared for the next interpreting jobs.

5. Support community

Giving official interpreters and volunteers commemorative goods from the event, as in the previous Olympics, helps them feel they are part of

the Games, which in turn improves their performance. As we discussed, interpreters in the Olympics often work by themselves for long time. To share their experience with fellow interpreters would help them to keep motivated. Those groups of fellow interpreters might be called as a support community. Emotional bonds among interpreters in such community will improve quality in interpreting.

6. Conclusion

In light of the IOC's selection of Tokyo as the host city of the 2020 Summer Olympics, this paper explored the experience of interpreting in previous Olympics. It also provided suggestions for better provision of interpreting at the forthcoming Tokyo Olympics. Learning from previous Games, if we prepare appropriately, Tokyo in 2020 will be fruitful for athletes, guests, and interpreters.

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